Part 2: She Did It Again

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NOV 21, 2025 · PAID

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She did it again.

It was four years later. Another presidential campaign. Another book project. Another candidate whom she had profiled. Another note—a poem, according to Olivia—though this time from the candidate to her.

"Yr open mouth awaiting my harvest," Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is now the Secretary of Health and Human Services, had written to my then-fiancé. "Drink from me Love."

He continued, "I mean to squeeze your cheeks to force open your mouth. I'll hold your nose as you look up at me to encourage you to swallow. 'Dont spill a drop'. I am a river You are my canyon. I mean to flow through you. I mean to subdue and tame you. My Love."

I can't say there weren't any signs. I did find it odd that Olivia was simultaneously reading Robert Greene's *The Art of Seduction* and Maureen Callahan's *Ask Not: The Kennedys and the Women They Destroyed*. But the poem—let's call it "American Canyon"—and many others, too explicit to print, changed everything. (Thanks to Bobby, I am now aware of something called felching.)

Remember the bamboo from Part 1? Well, bamboo is actually a type of grass, and underground, it's all connected in a sprawling network, just like the parts of this story I never wanted to tell. I wish I hadn't been put in this position, that I didn't have to write about any of this, that I didn't have to subject myself or my loved ones to embarrassment and further loss of privacy. But Olivia has reignited a campaign of misinformation about what really happened, and Bobby, who has denied everything, is one of the most consequential policymakers in America. Unfortunately, I'm the only other person who knows everything. And while sometimes I wish I could unknow it, the least I can do is share the parts I believe you should know too.

So now that we're here, you have to know more about what happened with Mark Sanford in 2020 to understand what happened with Olivia and Bobby in 2024. And you have to know more about Bobby's "poetry" to understand why he and Olivia plotted to destroy me.

Olivia insisted that she and Mark only had sex one time, on the night of February 24, 2020, after she arrived at his home at about 7 PM. During their encounter, he was paranoid that she was taping him, so she briefly turned her phone's recorder on and off to show him how it worked, leaving behind a short voice memo of the two of them giggling. She left his house around 11 PM.

I arrived in South Carolina the next morning. Mark's brief challenge to Trump for the GOP nomination was long over, but he was an eager and popular source for the many reporters then descending on the state to cover the Democratic primary a few days later, including me. Oblivious to their tryst the previous evening, I texted Mark and asked him to get lunch with me and Olivia, which I later learned had sent her into a panic. She called Mark, explained that I was her boyfriend, and asked him not to meet with me. Among other things, her recklessness detonated my relationship with a good source in a key state. Mark politely told her not to contact him again until she was single and had her life figured out, which is why a few days later, when she was at the Kimpton Hotel in Nashville, she kept writing and re-writing those notes of apology that she stuffed in the backpack she later threw on our bedroom floor.

I did not believe Olivia's version of events. I believed she had engaged in a long affair with Mark. She insisted that while her "infatuation" lasted months, it was one-sided and they only ever slept together that one night. She insisted that I search her phone and laptop to corroborate her story, but, of course, she had already erased everything that was incriminating.

Well, almost everything. There was that voice memo. And then there was something much stranger. Olivia had written a tabloid-style news story about how "sources in Washington, D.C. and Charleston have been buzzing recently about an unexpected romance: Mark Sanford and Olivia Nuzzi," who was described as "one of the most famous political reporters in America," a "blonde beauty" who "gained critical acclaim as a skilled profile writer, gaining access to the powerful and the mysterious and turning it into pure journalistic gold."

Olivia told me she wrote the fake article as an exercise to think through what might be the worst that could be said publicly if the affair became known, though that didn't really make sense to me given the piece's tone. Her fantasizing about what it would be like when her secret relationship with a notorious politician finally became public would repeat itself during her affair with Bobby.

In a text exchange, I also asked Olivia if she sent Mark any pictures that might embarrass us if they became public. She insisted that she only "sent one inappropriate photo."

“Before or after you had sex with him?” I asked.

“After.”

“Why did you send it?”

“Honestly because I am fucking retarded.”

Yes, I know I should have run far away. But COVID lockdowns had just descended on Washington, and she had no place to go. So we stayed together and tried to fix it, doing all the things couples do when there’s a breach of trust, including counseling, digital transparency, and reading a lot of Esther Perel.

I eventually came to believe Olivia’s account of the affair, but it took her a long time to get over Mark. Olivia develops addictive-like attachments to the men she loves, who are generally older and more powerful, and she pursues them until she conquers them. “I’m three for three,” she said to me in a moment of levity after the affair with Mark.

Aside from that notable moment of bragging, Olivia was mostly deeply apologetic and ashamed. She offered to pay back our book advance because the affair had sabotaged the project. She spiraled into self-loathing and self-pity about what a ”fuck-up” she was. Other times, she unloaded on me, listing all the ways I had made mistakes in our relationship, and insisting that she deserved another chance. By the fall of 2022, we were engaged.

But Olivia’s affair with Mark, which she called “My Mistake,” became a low-level hum that haunted the relationship. Often we could crank up some joyful music and drown it out, but it never quieted. She accused me of never really forgiving her. I accused her of never really working to repair things. In hindsight, it seems obvious that the whole thing was going to combust. But at the time, I had no idea how much would go up in flames.

One morning in mid-August 2024, I woke her gently and whispered, “Olivia, you have to leave.”

It was finally the end for us, which, in many ways, was a relief. It took a while to get through the formalities of her initial denials about Bobby. “I have not cheated on you,” she said over and over again. “I didn’t do anything.” I told her it didn’t matter what she said because “we’re done.”

With that, she offered her first concession. “Do I have a personal relationship with him? Yes,” she said. “Did I cheat on you? No!”

It went like this for a while, with her gradually offering more honest explanations, and adding new details until she held firm about one line she swore she never crossed.

“I’m not denying that there’s a relationship,” she said, “but I’m telling you the truth that I have not had a physical relationship with him. I’ve never had sex with him. I’ve never touched him.”

That seemed improbable. Olivia first interviewed Bobby in July 2023 for a piece about Fran Drescher that was never published. She had texted me at the time. “Just talked to RFK,” she said. “He’s crazy.” She loved crazy people, so it should have been a red flag, though I thought nothing of it. But a seed had been planted, and she soon returned to L.A. and interviewed him during a hike, when he grabbed her hand hard and wouldn’t let go, which, she told me and others, had frightened and disturbed her.

Her profile of Bobby came out in November. It was now August. Could it really be possible that they carried on for all this time, and she never touched him, at least not since he grabbed her on that hike?

“I swear,” she said.

As she opened up about what had really happened, she made it clear that there was an intensity to this affair that was beyond the 2020 “infatuation.”

“That other thing,” she said, referring to Mark, “was one event and nobody loved anybody.”

With Bobby, she loved him, but “I never slept with him.”

I have never been able to convey her near-total obsession with Bobby properly. What I can say with authority is that it seeped into every corner of her life, affected every relationship she had, and drove every decision she made in late 2023 and all of 2024, including her catch-and-kill operations on his behalf, the campaign strategy memos she wrote him, and the other journalistic transgressions that have still not been disclosed.

For me, it was like waking up and learning she was a heroin addict or had joined a cult. Later, I would foolishly conclude that I was the only person who could help her get sober or deprogrammed, which was the biggest mistake of my life, but for now, I was just in pain.

“Do you think your dad would be proud of you?” I asked, knowing he had been the most important person in her life.

“That’s really low,” she said.

I asked her to remove her engagement ring, and I was surprised by her stunned response.

“I’m not taking that off,” she screamed as she began sobbing. “I don’t want to take it off!”

As she left, I said something that would have enormous ramifications going forward.

“People are going to ask me what happened,” I told Olivia, “and I’m going to tell the truth.”

She seemed paralyzed with fear, and I frankly didn’t quite understand why.

It was only later, when we were deep into what would become weeks of conversations about every detail of what transpired between her and Bobby—who had told her that he demanded “discipline and fearlessness” and, “at times, total submission”—that she explained her terrified reaction that August morning.

“If anyone ever finds out,” Olivia told me, “I’m afraid Bobby will kill me.”

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Benjamin Ryan Hazard Ratio: Benjamin Ryan 2h

This is quite the tale. When will there be a part 3?

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Anna Scott Second Shift Notes 1h

Ow. It’s painful to read some of the details here — the fake tabloid story, the BJ poem (eek). This went from media gossip to a really sad story about self destruction and toxic relationships. I feel for both of you in different ways. It’s pretty gutsy to lay this all out!

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